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Defense and Validation in Shi'i and Sunni Tradition: The Case of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr*

In early Islam, nobility was not only earned; it was also inherited. Histories and biographical dictionaries laid great emphasis on genealogy, and links to noble forebears were carefully commemorated. This article examines the case of one man, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, whose bloodlines connected him to Abū Bakr, the first caliph of the Sunnis, but whose actions bound him strongly to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the first imam of the Shi'is. Given the importance of genealogy in the early Islamic community, what becomes of a man whose actions contravene his descent? How is he treated in the different traditions? How is a case as problematic as Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's handled in discourse that routinely legitimated its subjects on the basis of birth and kinship?

To begin with, the facts on which the traditions are more or less in agreement.

Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr was born to Abū Bakr and his wife Asmā' bint 'Umays during the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage in 10 A.H./631 C.E. After the Prophet's death in 11 A.H./632 A.D., Abū Bakr became the first caliph to lead the Muslim community. Upon Abū Bakr's own death in 13 A.H./634 C.E., when his son Muḥammad was only three

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years old, the boy's mother married ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Muḥammad thus grew up as the stepson of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Otherwise, very little is known about his childhood and youth.

In early adulthood Muḥammad found himself in Egypt where, with a few others, he fomented a rising against the third caliph, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān.[1] We also learn that in 36 A.H./656 C.E., at the beginning of the first Muslim civil war, when Egyptian rebels besieged the house of caliph ʿUthmān, Muḥammad was among those who infiltrated the building, who then assaulted and killed the caliph.

At the death of ʿUthmān, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, cousin of the Prophet and stepfather of Muḥammad, became the new caliph. In the same year, his accession was contested by a coalition led by Muḥammad's sister ʿĀ'isha (widow of the Prophet), his paternal cousin Ṭalḥa b. ʿUbaydallah, and his brother-in-law al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām. These three are said to have demanded that ʿAlī punish the murderers of his predecessor. Muḥammad then sided with his stepfather against the anti-ʿAlid coalition headed by his paternal kin and fought against them at the Battle of the Camel. Thereafter, he fought at the side of ʿAlī against others contesting his rule, such as Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān and the Syrian coalition at the Battle of Ṣiffin. Muḥammad was later appointed governor of Egypt by ʿAlī. While holding this post he was killed, in the year 38 A.H./ 658 C.E., by a member of an army sent into Egypt by Muʿāwiya. His death and the resulting loss of Egypt to Muʿāwiya marked the beginning of the end of ʿAlī's rule. Two and a half years later, ʿAlī himself was killed and power was transferred to the Umayyads.

Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr was thus an active member of the second Muslim generation, who participated in many of the pivotal events of the period. At the same time, his loyalties and political commitments conflicted with notions of family cohesiveness and solidarity based on a patriarchal model. The task of depicting him would therefore pose a challenge to Muslim historians. On the one hand, he was the son of Abū Bakr, the first caliph of the Sunnis who, in Shiʿi tradition, is considered to have been the first to usurp ʿAlī's right to succession. On the other hand, he grew up as the stepson of ʿAlī, became a strong supporter of his stepfather, and fought valiantly on his side in all his major battles. Consequently, he occupies a special place in Shiʿi

1. Aḥmad b. Yaḥya al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Wiesbaden: Bibliotheca Islamica, Franz Steiner, 1979), 4A: 539-540, 550.

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tradition which, instead of placing him with the cursed Bakrids, does its best to idealize his image and set him apart from his paternal kin.

One further factor needs to be taken into account. The horrific death that Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr met in Egypt at the hands of Mu'āwiya's men made him a perfect exemplar of the atrocities associated with civil war in both traditions. The precise circumstances of his death are unclear. Some reports suggest that he died in combat. The more general belief, however, is that he was killed outside the main fray, then stuffed into the carcass of a jackass and burnt, [2] or even – according to one report – burnt alive inside the carcass. [3] Other reports suggest that he was decapitated before being burnt and that his head was sent for display at the court of Mu'āwiya. [4] Whatever its basis in reality, this richly symbolic gesture became an important topos in Islamic historiography. It allowed Muḥammad's death to be remembered in a

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2. Khalifa b. Khayyāṭ al-'Uṣfurī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyā al-'Umarī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-risāla, 1977), 192; Muḥammad al-Kindī, *The History of the Governors of Egypt*, ed. Nicholas August Koenig (New York: AMS Press Inc., Contributions to Oriental History and Phililogy No. II, 1966), 16-17; 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jawhar*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: Dār al-ma'rifa, 1982), 2: 420.

3. In some of the reports, he is said to have been stuffed inside the hide of a donkey as both *jild* and *jawf* are used in the accounts. Al-Mas'ūdī includes a report that suggests that Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr was set on fire inside the carcass of the jackass when he may not have been dead yet (*wa bihi shay'un min al-ḥayāh*), in al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 2: 420.

4. The late Mamluk historian Ibn Iyās includes a relatively detailed account of the death of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr that surpasses in breadth and detail the accounts of many of his predecessors. He transmits a report according to which a certain Zimām al-khādim buried the head and body of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr outside of al-Fusṭāṭ and built a mosque in that location that came to be known as the mosque of Zimām. Ibn Iyās adds that this location became a popular pilgrimage site (*yazūruhu al-nās*), in Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1975), 1: 116. Al-Harawī erroneously mentions the existence of the tombs of two of the children of Abū Bakr in his listing of the *ziyārāt* sites in Fusṭāṭ, while failing to name them, in Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Harawī, *Guide des Lieux de Pélerinage*, trans. Janine Sourdel-Thomine (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1957), 89; Ibn Jubayr on the other hand mentions the existence of the *mashhads* of each of Muḥammad and Aḥmad sons of Abū Bakr as well a *mashhad* of Asmā' bint Abī Bakr in al-Qarāfa in Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥlat ibn Jubayr* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir/ Dār Bayrūt, 1964). Ibn al-

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realm apart, that of firsts (or *awā'il*): the same accounts that report the despatch of his head to Mu'āwiya also make this the first head to be so transported and paraded in Islam (Ar. *awwal ra's ṭīfa bihi fi al-islām*). [5]

Using Sunni and Shi'i *ḥadīth*, as well as biographical and historical sources, this article studies the representations of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr. By juxtaposing the different portrayals of the man, it elucidates the historiographical devices used by both traditions, and at the same time exposes the similarity of their concerns and methods.

Zayyāt mentions the *mashhad* of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr built by Zimām, yet specifies that it only contained his head, in Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Zayyāt, *al-Kawākib al-sayyāra fi tartīb al-ziyāra* (Baghdad : Maktabat al-muthannā, 1907), 103, 184. It is worth mentioning that Abū Bakr is not known to have had a son called Aḥmad, and that it is unlikely that his daughter Asmā' bint Abī Bakr who died in Mecca at the end of the second civil war would have been buried in Egypt.

5. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr is not the only candidate for this distinction; he is challenged in most *awā'il* works by another prominent 'Alid fighter, 'Amr b. al-Ḥamiq al-Khuzā'ī. Some *awā'il* works list both Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and 'Amr b. al-Ḥamiq al-Khuzā'ī under this category of firsts, and concede that, if the truth about the carrying of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's head to Mu'āwiya can be absolutely established, then he would definitely be the first since he is known to have died before 'Amr b. al-Ḥamiq, see for example Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb al-awā'il*, ed. Muḥammad Shakūr al-Ḥājī Amrīr (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-risāla, 1983), 107 and Abī Hilāl al-'Askarī, *Kitāb al-awā'il*, ed. Walid Qaṣṣāb and Muḥammad al-Miṣrī (Riyad: Dār al-'ulūm, n.d.), 21-23. Most *awā'il* works though list 'Amr b. al-Ḥamiq exclusively, such as in 'Abdallah b. Muḥammad b. Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-muṣannaf fi al-aḥādīth wa al-āthār*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Shāhin (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1995), 6: 201, 7: 272; Aḥmad b. Abī 'Āṣim al-Shaybānī, *Kitāb al-awā'il*, ed. Maḥmūd Naṣṣār (Beirut: Dār al-jil, 1991), 71 and Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Bayhaqī, *al-Maḥāsin wa al-masāwi'*, ed. Muḥammad Abī al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Maṭba'at nahḍat Miṣr, 1961), 2: 69. It is also important to mention that the wording/designation of this category varies among the *awā'il* works, so it also exists under the label "*awwal ra's uhdiya fi al-islām*" (first head to be given as an offering in Islam), "*awwal man uhdiya fi al-islām*" (first [person] to be offered as a gift) and under "*awwal ra's ḥumila min balad ilā balad*" (first head to be transported from country to country), but the idea is obviously the same and the designated first actors – or first victims in this case – are also the same. Yet, regardless of who is actually first in this category, this association between these two Shi'i fighters parallels the association of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and 'Ammār b. Yāsir referred to in the text.

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A. Shi'i sources

The presence among the ranks of the supporters of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib of the youngest son of Abū Bakr served both to strengthen the 'Alid claims to represent the best of Quraysh, and to show that some of 'Alī's adversaries (in the case of the Ṭalḥa-'Ā'isha-al-Zubayr coalition) did not even enjoy the full support of of their own kin. Conversely, the shady role that Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr is reported to have played in instigating revolt in Egypt against the caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān and then in the latter's assassination had the potential to reflect negatively on 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib himself, because of the known bond between the two men. Thus, in dealing with Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, Shi'i biographers, historians and *ḥadīth* transmitters had to be careful. It was useful to expatiate upon Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's personal and political attachment to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, but it was essential to downplay as much as possible his involvement in the death of 'Uthmān b. 'Affān. Not only was the commemoration of the latter event liable to incriminate 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib by association, it could also cast doubt on 'Alī's claim to be unable – rather than simply unwilling – to punish his predecessor's murderers.

The Shi'i tradition offers several accounts justifying the distinguished position of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, all of which provide insights into the mechanisms of legitimation and validation. Interestingly, many of these mechanisms prove not to be unique to the Shi'i tradition. As the later part of this article will show, similar themes and devices serve similar ends in Sunni accounts.

1. Validation by Predestination

The Shi'i historian Ibn Hilāl al-Thaqafī provides a telling account of the death of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr. It relates a strange dream that Asmā' bint 'Umays, his mother, reputedly had shortly before Muḥammad was conceived. The passage runs as follows:

> Abū Bakr went on a military expedition. Asmā' bint 'Umays, who was married to him at the time, saw in a dream that Abū Bakr's head and beard were dyed red and that he was covered with white clothes. She came to 'Ā'isha and told her about the dream. 'Ā'isha said: If your dream

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> holds true, then Abū Bakr must have been killed; the dye is his blood and the clothes are his shroud. Then, she began to cry. The Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, walked in while she was crying and asked: What has made her cry? They said: O Prophet of Allah, nobody has made her cry, but Asmā' told us about a dream she had that relates to Abū Bakr. The Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, was told about the dream. He said: It is not as 'Ā'isha has interpreted it. Abū Bakr will come back safely from the war. He will have relations with Asmā' and she will become pregnant by him with a boy that she will call Muḥammad, whom Allah will appoint as a wrath upon the infidels and the hypocrites.

Al-Thaqafī concludes this account by stating: "Such was the young man Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr – may the mercy of Allah be upon him – and he was killed on this day (and so it was as [fore]told)." [6]

This story illustrates the length to which Shi'i historiography will go in order to represent Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr as a fighter for the just cause and hence an 'Alid par excellence. Using the favored medieval Islamic medium of the inspired vision as a means of communicating with and guiding the living, it ante-dates Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's divinely-inspired mission, legitimating his role in Shi'i history and establishing the justice of his cause in advance. [7] The significance of the dream and its interpretation are enhanced by the fact that it is none other than the Prophet himself who corrects 'Ā'isha's false construction. [8]

The notion of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's being predestined to fight on the side of the righteous party against the unbelievers is present in many other Shi'i accounts, but without always being spelled out. At times, the portrayal of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr as a fighter against the infidels (Ar. *kāfirīn*) and hypocrites (Ar. *munāfiqīn*) is amplified with Qur'anic references. A notable instance is his verbal confrontation with his killer, Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj. [9] When questioned by Ibn Ḥudayj

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6. Ibn Hilāl al-Thaqafī, *al-Ghārāt aw al-istinfār wa al-ghārāt*, ed. 'Abd al-Zahrā' al-Ḥusaynī al-Khaṭīb (Beirut: Dār al-aḍwā', 1987), 189.
7. On the use of dreams in early Islamic and medieval Islamic texts see Leah Kinberg, *Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's Morality in the Guise of Dreams: A Critical Edition of Kitāb al Manām* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
8. Of course, the fact that, in the Shi'i sources, it is 'Ā'isha who is made to provide the wrong interpretation of the dream is by itself significant.
9. Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj is often referred to in many sources as Mu'āwiya b. Khudayj.

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about his role in opposing 'Uthmān, Muḥammad is said to have defended himself by reciting verses from *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* ("Whoso judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed: such are unbelievers, such are wrong-doers, such are evil-livers"), [10] thus ascribing unbelief to Caliph 'Uthmān and justifying his attitude towards him. [11]

This and other stories predicting that Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, as a fighter against the infidels and hypocrites would be associated with the righteous party, establish a parallel between him and other 'Alid/Shi'i heroes. Such statements correspond to a tradition attributed to the Prophet, which stated that 'Ammār b. Yāsir would be killed by the guilty party (Ar. *al-fi'a al-bāghiya*). [12] Other accounts seek to assert a more direct parallel between Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and 'Ammār b. Yāsir by means of the Shi'i tradition attributed to the sixth imam, Abū 'Abdallah (Ja'far al-Ṣādiq), which proclaimed that "Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and 'Ammār b. Yāsir refuse to accept that Allah will be disobeyed." [13]

2. Validation by Dissociation from Paternal Kin

As well as representing the actions of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr as foreordained and his commitment to the cause of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as divinely prescribed, the Shi'i tradition does its best to dissociate Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr from his paternal kin and to highlight the affinity between him and his adoptive father. In an often-cited Shi'i tradition, it is reported that "there is no family which has no noble

10. *Qur'ān*, V: 44, 45 and 47. The English quotations are from Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (USA: Mentor Book, n.d.), 100-101.
11. Al-Thaqafī, *al-Ghārāt*, 187.
12. 'Ammār b. Yāsir was an early convert to Islam. A faithful companion of the Prophet, he was also from early on a strong supporter of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib who heavily relied on him during his tenure as caliph. 'Ammār was killed fighting on the side of 'Alī against the Syrian coalition at the Battle of Ṣiffīn. For a slightly more elaborate biography, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (1960), s.v. "'Ammār b. Yāsir," by H. Reckendorf.
13. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār ma'rifat al-rijāl* (known as *Rijāl al-Kashshī*), ed. Ḥasan al-Muṣṭafawī (Iran: Dāneshgāh-e Mashhad, 1348 A.H.), 63.

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member, and the most noble member from an evil family is Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr." [14] Likewise, the frequent statements attributed to Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr in Shi'i tradition in which he denounces his natural father, foresees his fate in hell, and detaches himself from him (by declaring himself *barā' minhu*) are meant to attest to Muḥammad's nobility of character and his faithfulness to his stepfather. [15] One of the sources even attributes verses to Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr in which he addresses his father Abū Bakr, and credits Allah with bestowing upon him a nobility that was not his by birth:

> O father, I found that which is true:
> he, whose father you are, was disappointed and ashamed;
> He has brought me out of you, who
> has brought pearls out of salty water. [16]

Yet despite the frequency of attempts in the Shi'i sources to dissociate Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr from his paternal kin, there are also exceptions. At times, establishing or stressing the link between Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and his paternal kin was apparently seen as more advantageous to the 'Alid cause. This was especially the case in the accounts of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib's struggle against Mu'āwiya.

An example is provided by al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's narrative of the Battle of Ṣiffin. It seems that the Syrian supporters of Mu'āwiya, attempting to prove the moral legitimacy of Mu'āwiya's claim, consistently pointed to the fact that 'Ubaydallah b. 'Umar b. al-Khāṭṭāb, the son of the second caliph 'Umar b. al- Khāṭṭāb, was fighting at Mu'āwiya's side. The supporters of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib would retort by pointing out to the Syrians that 'Ubaydallah b. 'Umar only went to Mu'āwiya's side because 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib had intended to exact punishment from him for a murder that 'Ubaydallah had committed. [17]

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14. Al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār*, 64 and Sayyid Nūr-e Allah Shushtarī, *Majālis-e al-mu'minīn* (Tehran: Kitābfurūshi-ye islāmiyye, 1375 A.H.), 1: 277.
15. Al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār*, 64.
16. Shushtarī, *Majālis-e al-mu'minīn*, 1: 277.
17. Ya'qūbī mentions that 'Ubayd allah b. 'Umar killed his father's killer Abū Lu'lu'a, and the latter's wife and daughter, but did not stop at that for he also killed al-Hurmuzān whom he followed and stabbed to death. See Aḥmad b. Abī Ya'qūb b. Wāḍiḥ al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir), 2: 160-161.

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The Syrians, however, were not silenced by this answer, and kept bragging that they had the son of 'Umar on their side. In response to the Syrians' insistence, the supporters of 'Alī are said to have challenged the Syrians to answer one simple question, namely: "who was better, Abū Bakr or 'Umar?" When the Syrians admitted that Abū Bakr was better than 'Umar, the supporters of 'Alī triumphantly said: "Here is Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr with us, an honorable man who has not committed any crime against God nor escaped from punishment for it." [18] In this instance, the Shi'i sources are willing to highlight the link between Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and his father and to acknowledge the relative superiority of Abū Bakr over his successor, in order to make a point that struck at the heart of the enemy's argument. If the Syrians considered that the support of the son of the second caliph was a criterion of legitimacy, then the 'Alids had the support of the son of the first caliph and the better man.

3. Validation by Adoption: Caliph 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib

The support that Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr gave 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is made out to be unstinting. Whether leading the right wing of his army at the Battle of the Camel or fighting at his side at the Battle of Ṣiffīn, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr is always represented as most willing to help his stepfather. [19] Conversely, accounts of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib

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18. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār fi faḍā'il al-a'imma al-aṭhār* (Beirut: Dār al-thiqlayn, 1994), 2: 14. A less elaborate version of this *tafākhur* story had appeared more than a century earlier in Naṣr b. Muzāḥim al-Minqarī, *Waq'at ṣiffīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 2nd. ed. (Qom: Manshūrāt maktabat Āyat Allah al-'uzmā al-mar'ashī al-najafī, 1403 A.H.), 293.

19. Some sources report that he led the cavalry of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib during the Battle of the Camel. Others mention that he was part of his army elite force known as *shurṭat al-khamīs*. On the term *shurṭat al-khamīs* see Fred M. Donner, "The Shurta in Early Umayyad Syria" in M. Adnan Bakhit and Robert Schick (eds.), *The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham during the Umayyad period: Proceedings of the Third Symposium* (Amman: University of Jordan Press, Biald al-Sham History Committee, 1989), 2: 247-262, and especially 249-251; Michael Lecker, "Shurṭat al-Khamīs and other matters: Notes on the Translation of Ṭabarī's Ta'rīkh" *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14 (1991), 276-289 and especially 276-280.

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suggest that he developed a genuine attachment to the lad that he had helped to raise. Statements to that effect were frequently attributed to him, suggesting that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib had come to consider Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr as his kin, and as one of his closest associates, although he may have occasionally regretted relying on him so heavily. The Shiʿi tradition has built upon this closeness of the two men. [20] On occasion, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr is described as one of the disciples (Ar. ḥawārīs) of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. [21] ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib is also said to have attested to Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's virtues by describing him as one of the Muḥammads (Ar. Maḥāmida) who "refuse to accept that Allah will be disobeyed". [22] As if combining the present theme with a memory of the dream of Asmāʾ bint ʿUmays, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān represents the support that Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr showed towards ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib as divinely predetermined. This version of events is cleverly attributed to ʿĀʾisha, paternal sister of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and wife of Prophet Muḥammad. She recounts how, when her brother Muḥammad was still an infant, her father Abū Bakr presented him to the Prophet and requested that the Prophet give him a

20. Both Shiʿi and Sunni sources bear witness as well to the attachment that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib showed to his foster son. Upon hearing the news of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's murder at the hands of Muʿāwiya's men, and the joy that the Syrians had displayed at the news of his death, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib is said to have shown great and visible distress and to have testified, both publicly and in private, to his own feeling of loss. In one of the more elaborate obituaries that ʿAlī is said to have pronounced on that occasion, he is said to have declared: "We have ached for him as much as they have rejoiced. I have never ached for a loss since I have entered these wars like my pain at his loss. He was my stepchild, and I considered him a son" in al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, 2: 420.

21. Al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār*, 9. In al-Ṭūsī's account, the *ḥawārī*s of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib are listed as consisting of ʿAmr b. al-Ḥamiq al-Khuzāʿi, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, Maytham b. Yaḥyā al-Tammār and Uways al-Qaranī. The assignment of *ḥawārī*s in the Shiʿi tradition to each of Prophet Muḥammad, Caliph ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and the remaining imams is parallel to similar accounts in the Sunni tradition with regards to assigning one *ḥawārī* (usually al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām) or several *ḥawārī*s to the Prophet Muḥammad, see for example Muḥibb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarī, *al-Riyāḍ al-naḍira fī manāqib al-ʿashara* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-islāmiyya, 2nd ed., 1953), 2: 355.

22. The "Muḥammads" or "Maḥāmida" are listed as being Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥudhayfa and Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, in al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār*, 70.

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name and invoke a blessing upon him. The Prophet gave the baby the name Muḥammad and blessed him, saying: "Allah, bless him and grant him his righteousness, help him in the pursuit of His truth, and make him loving towards your Prophet and the family of his Prophet"(Ar. *Allahumma bārik fihī wa irziqhu birrahu, wa a'inhu 'alā ta'diyat haqqihi, wa ij'alhu muḥibban li-nabiyyika wa li-ahli nabiyyihi*). 'Ā'isha ends her account by stating that she recalled the Prophet's invocation while fighting against her brother Muḥammad and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib at the Battle of the Camel, and now regretted undertaking that military action. [23]

4. Validation by Maternal Influence: Asmā' bint 'Umays

While the adoptive affiliation between Muḥammad and his stepfather could help explain some of his actions, apparently it was not sufficient by itself. Therefore, although Shi'i sources acknowledged the effect of acculturation and adoptive affiliation, they also sought to explain more fully the reasons for Muḥammad's failure to behave like the rest of his paternal kin.

In order to justify and explain Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's righteousness, Shi'i transmitters were able to resort once again to genealogy. If Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's paternal genealogy was unimpressive, his maternal descent was a different matter. Even though the Shi'i sources do not attempt to claim greatness for the Banū Khath'am (the clan to which Muḥammad's mother belonged), they do recognize the personal excellence of Asmā' bint 'Umays. Aside from the nobility that she acquired through her marriages to two of the most famous members of the clan of Banū Hāshim, Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, she is often portrayed in the Shi'i sources as a genuinely virtuous woman. [24] On this view, Asmā' bint

23. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, 2: 513.

24. Asmā' bint 'Umays is not unique in her family for having been tied to great men. In fact, three of her sisters had also contracted very honorable marriages. Her maternal half-sister Maymūna was one of the wives of Prophet Muḥammad, her maternal half-sister Lubāba Umm al-Faḍl was the wife of the Prophet's uncle al-'Abbās, whereas her paternal half-sister Salmā bint 'Umays had been the wife of the Prophet's uncle Ḥamza.

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'Umays' alliances are symptomatic of her own worth. She is an intrinsically moral character. As such, she is said to have helped shape the personalities of her sons and to have instilled virtue in them. For Shi'i sources, this capacity for moral formation was particularly important in the case of her son Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr. Unable to rely overmuch on good traits inherited from his father, he is repeatedly said to have inherited all his virtuous characteristics from his mother. [25]

The Shi'i sources use many stories to illustrate the generous character of Asmā' bint 'Umays. The most famous of these is the story of the role played by Asmā' as attendant to Fāṭima, daughter of the Prophet, on the night of the latter's marriage to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. It is reported that on that occasion the Prophet entered the chamber of Fāṭima and dismissed all the women present there. Asmā' bint 'Umays would not leave. When asked to explain herself, she told the Prophet that she had been present at his wife Khadīja's deathbed and that she had heard her cry. When she had asked Khadīja why she was crying, even though she was the mistress of all women in Paradise (Ar. *sayyidat nisā' al-janna*), Khadīja had confided in her. She had told her that she was crying because she was leaving behind her daughter Fāṭima. She explained that Fāṭima was still young but that, when the time came, she would need help on her wedding night. Khadīja was sad because she would not be there to provide it. To console the dying woman Asmā' bint 'Umays volunteered her services and promised Khadīja that she would take her place and remain by Fāṭima's side on her wedding night. When the Prophet heard the explanation provided by Asmā' bint 'Umays, he was pleased and blessed Asmā' profusely. [26]

Concurrently, most Shi'i sources allow that the protagonist of the story of Fāṭima's wedding may not be Asmā' bint 'Umays. And indeed, the attribution of this role to Asmā' bint 'Umays is historically highly

25. Al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār*, 63-64.

26. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, 2: 357-358. This story had earlier appeared in non-Shi'i works such as in 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥman al-A'ẓamī (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-majlis al-'ilmī, 1972), 5: 485-486, Account 9781. Moreover, a variation of this story later appeared in the entry on Asmā' bint 'Umays in the Sufi biographical dictionary of *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* in al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1963), 1: 75.

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doubtful: the death of Khadīja took place years after Asmā' bint 'Umays left for Abyssinia with her husband Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib, and the marriage of Fāṭima to 'Alī took place before they returned. The sources may have deliberately confused Asmā' with her half-sister Salmā bint 'Umays, wife of Ḥamza b. Abī Ṭālib, who was perhaps the original protagonist of the story. [27]

Another important element in the portrayal of Asmā' bint 'Umays as an avid supporter of *ahl al-bayt* is the story of her assisting Fāṭima with her burial arrangements. It is said that when Fāṭima fell sick and knew that she was going to die, her modesty made her fear that the traditional bier used to display a woman's corpse would not be appropriate for her because she would then only be covered by a sheet. Asmā' helped Fāṭima reproduce the model of a covered bier that she had seen used in Abyssinia, which satisfied Fāṭima's sense of propriety. As a result, it is said, Fāṭima smiled for the first time since the Prophet's death and blessed Asmā' for her suggestion. In many reports, Asmā' is also said to have been the only one who helped 'Alī in washing the body of the deceased Fāṭima.

Although these stories attribute great compassion and kindness to Asmā' bint 'Umays and are often used to celebrate her outstanding character, they also highlight the extreme closeness of Asmā' to the family of the Prophet. In fact, from early on, Asmā' bint 'Umays is represented as belonging to the close entourage of the Prophet's most beloved. Not only was she supposedly present at the deathbed of the Prophet's first wife Khadija, but is also said to have participated in the washing of the body of the Prophet's daughter Umm Kulthūm at her death in 9 A.H. As in the stories of the marriage and burial of Fāṭima, the emphasis is on her intimate and continued involvement in the life of the family. [28]

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27. This is not the only instance where the two sisters are confused. Some sources confuse Asmā' bint 'Umays and her paternal half-sister Salmā bint 'Umays, often claiming that it was Asmā' bint 'Umays who had married the Prophet's uncle Ḥamza.

28. Asmā' bint 'Umays' participation in washing the body of the Prophet's daughter Umm Kulthūm is attested in Yūsuf b. 'Abdallah Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī'āb fi ma'rifat al-aṣḥāb*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bajjāwī (Cairo: Maṭba'at nahḍat Miṣr, n.d.), 4: 1952-1953.

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B. Sunni sources

There is significantly less information about Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr in the Sunni sources than in the Shi'i sources. Moreover, the Sunni sources show much more confusion where Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr is concerned. Although interested in the circumstances of his birth, they find their main focus in his role as participant in the murder of Caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān. [29]

The Sunni sources are often at a loss to explain Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's political stance. His fomenting of the first civil war and dividing the Islamic community stood in sharp contrast to the role played by his father Abū Bakr in maintaining the unity of Islam after the death of the Prophet. That the son should have contributed to undoing the work of his father was hard to justify, and Sunni historiography struggled with this issue. Accordingly, a main concern in most of the sources is Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's paternal descent. They attempt to maintain his father's reputation, at the same time preserving that of his son al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, by casting doubt on the extent of his active involvement in the killing

29. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad, Kitāb* 3, *Bāb* 320, eds. Shu'ayb al-Arnā'ūṭ et al. (Beirut: Mu'assassat al-risāla, 1998), 22: 325, nr. 14440; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad, Kitāb* 6, *Bāb* 369, 45: 22, nr. 27084; al-Dārimī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Manāsik, Bāb* 11 (*bāb al-nafsā' wa al-ḥā'iḍ idhā arādatā al-ḥajj*), ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Dahmān ([Beirut]: Dār iḥyā' al-sunna al-nabawiya, [197-]), 2: 33; al-Dārimī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Manāsik, Bāb* 34 (*bāb fi sunnat al-ḥājj*) 2: 44-45; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb* 15 (*k. al-Ḥajj*), Bāb 109 (*bāb iḥrām al-nafsā'*), ed. Khalil Ma'mūn Shīḥā (Beirut: Dār al-ma'rifa, 1994), 8: 371-372, nr. 109-2900; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb* 15 (*k. al-Ḥajj*), *Bāb* 147 (*bāb ḥijjat al-nabī*), 8: 402-404, nr. 147-2941; Ibn Māja, *Sunan, Kitāb* 25 (*k. al-Manāsik*), Bāb 12 (*bāb al-nafsā' wa al-ḥā'iḍ tahillu bi'l-ḥajj*), ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī (n.p.: 'Issā Mūsā al-Ḥalabī, n.d.), 2: 971, nr. 2911; Ibn Māja, *Sunan, Kitāb* 25 (*k. al-Manāsik*), *Bab* 84 (*bāb Ḥijjat al-nabī*), 2: 1022, nr. 3074; Abū Dāwud, *Sunan, Kitāb* 9 (*k. al-Manāsik*), *Bāb* 9 (*bāb al-ḥā'iḍ tahillu bi'l-ḥajj*), ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ([Beirut]: Dār iḥyā' al-sunna al-nabawiya, [197-]), 2: 144, nr. 1743; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Ṭahāra, Bāb* 183 *(bāb mā taf'al al-nafsā' 'inda'l- iḥrām*), ed. Ḥasan al-Mas'ūdī ([Cairo]: al-Maṭba'a al-miṣriya bi'l-Azhar, [1930]), 1: 154; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-ghusl, Bāb* 23 *(bāb ightisāl al-nafsā' 'inda'l- iḥrām*), 1: 208; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Manāsik, Bāb* 26 *(bāb al-ghusl li'l-ihlāl),* 5: 127-128; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Manāsik, Bāb* 57 *(bāb ihlāl al-nafsā'),* 5: 164.

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of Caliph 'Uthmān. [30] Accounts even exist that present al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad asking God's forgiveness for the role played by his father in the death of 'Uthmān. [31] While Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's personal piety is mentioned in some of the Sunni sources, no attempt is made to develop this point as compensation for his role in the murder of Caliph 'Uthmān. More than that was deemed necessary to explain his controversial career. [32]

1. Parallel Use of the Argument from Predestination

Sunni historians and biographers appear not to have had any unified method for justifying Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's role in the uprising against Caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān and then in his murder. Most sources are content to exculpate him from striking the fatal blow, thus reducing his guilt. For example, Ibn al-Jawzī states that the Egyptian rebels conspired with three Medinans, namely Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, Muḥammad b. Ja'far and 'Ammār b. Yāsir, but makes no mention of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr in his account of the last hours and death of 'Uthmān. [33]

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30. Al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, who was raised by his paternal aunt 'Ā'isha after the death of his father, became renowned for his piety and knowledge. He was a famous religious and legal scholar and a member of the illustrious group of jurists of Medina known as "the Seven Jurists" (Ar. *al-fuqahā' al-sab'a*) who represented the ultimate juristic authority in Medina during the late first Muslim century. He is praised in both Shi'i and Sunni sources. In the Sunni sources, his piety, juristic ability and his role as a transmitter of prophetic traditions from his paternal aunt 'Ā'isha, widow of the Prophet, is highlighted. In the Shi'i sources, he is proclaimed to possess Shi'i sympathies (Ar. *tashayyu' li-ahl al-bayt*). Although no evidence exists to support this claim, al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad was a maternal first cousin of the fourth imam of the Shi'is, 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn, and the grandfather of the sixth imam of the Shi'is, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, through his daughter Umm Farwa. Thus, his close kinship to the fourth and sixth Shi'i imams might have contributed to this assumption about his *tashayyu'*.

31. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 4A: 585.

32. He is labeled as one of the hermits of Quraysh (Ar. *nussāk Quraysh*), in 'Abdallah b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, ed. Tharwat 'Akkāsha (Egypt: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1969), 175.

33. In 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī ta'rīkh al-mulūk wa al-umam*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā and Mus.t.afā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1992), 5: 53-55.

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At least one Sunni source, however, attempts to explain Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's actions by means of the argument that attributes an individual's deeds or misdeeds to predestination, which we have already seen used positively in the Shi'i literature. The story in question is one of many transmitted by Ibn Shabba in his *Ta'rīkh al-Madīna al-Munawwara*, the greater part of which covers the period of the first Islamic Civil War. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr appears there as a person doomed from his earliest days. Although the story relates to his infancy, it is sandwiched between accounts of the assault on Caliph 'Uthmān. Thus, despite its diametrically opposite purpose, it parallels the Shi'i report transmitted by al-Thaqafi, discussed above.

Immediately before the death of 'Uthmān, when Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr entered the house with the other rebels, the caliph told him to his face: "You were born like this." Then he explained what he meant. It was a custom that when a son was born to one of the companions of the Prophet the father would bring the infant to the Prophet seven days after the birth to receive a blessing and the *taḥnīk*.[34] "Abū Bakr had carried you to the Prophet of Allah," said 'Uthmān, "but you soiled your diapers so badly that he was ashamed to let you near him. So he took you back as he had brought you..."[35] On hearing this, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr grabbed 'Uthmān by the beard and hit him until he drew blood.

According to this account, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's bad nature prevented his obtaining the Prophet's blessing, which explained the persistence of the same vicious traits, culminating in the assault against 'Uthmān. We may also be meant to understand that 'Uthmān, in recounting this incident to his aggressor, hoped to save Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr from laying further shame on his father's memory.

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34. *Taḥnīk* is a process of blessing that the Prophet would practice on the newborn infants of his community. The Prophet would chew a date and rub the gums of the newborn infant with it while reciting prayers and invocations. After the death of the Prophet, the practice continued, but was supposed to be performed by one of the righteous people of the community. *Taḥnīk* is still practiced among many Muslims today. In the modern period, the infant's father or guardian would often be the one to perform the *Taḥnīk* on the newborn. For the performance of *Taḥnīk* in the early period, see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb* 38 (*k. al-Ādāb*), *Bāb* 5 (*bāb Istiḥbāb Taḥnīk al-mawlūd 'inda wilādatihi*), ed. Khalil Ma'mūn Shiḥā, 13: 348-354, nr. 22-5577.

35. Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rīkh al-madina al-munawwara*, ed. Fahim Shaltūt (Jeddah: Dār al-Iṣfahānī, 1393 A. H.), 4: 1302-1303.

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2. Parallel Use of Genealogy

Sunni sources resort as well to the use of genealogy, although they do not employ it in the same manner or for the same purpose as the Shi'i literature. In the traditions relating to Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, the use of genealogy seems mostly incidental.

The earliest genealogical references concerning Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr in a Sunni source occur in the famous biographical dictionary of Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd. Even though Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt*, the oldest surviving source of Islamic biographies, includes no entry specifically on Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, information about him is dispersed in other entries, notably those on his mother Asmā' bint 'Umays, his father Abū Bakr, and in the account of the murder of Caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān. In an account included in the biographies of both Asmā' bint 'Umays and Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib (first husband of Asmā' bint 'Umays), the two sons of Asmā', Muḥammad b. Ja'far and Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, are said to have engaged in a bragging competition (Ar. *mufakhara*). Each claimed superiority over the other by saying: "I am nobler than you are and my father is better than yours." 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is said to have asked Asmā' to arbitrate between her two sons on the matter, and she had cleverly replied that there had been no young Arab man better than Ja'far and no old man better than Abū Bakr. Then, when 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib retorted that she had left nothing for him, she replied: "By God, a three of whom you would be the most contemptible are truly noble men." [36]

Evidently this account does not revolve around Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, but is rather intended to show the wit of Asmā' bint 'Umays. The qualities of Asmā' bint 'Umays are not contested in the Sunni tradition, but her merits are described with greater subtlety.

Yet this account is also important where Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr is concerned. Although the pride that he shows in his paternal descent is obviously incidental, it is nonetheless significant. This is one of the few instances where he is made to stress his paternal descent and brag about

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36. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, (Beirut: Dār Bayrūt, 1978), 4: 41 (Biography of Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib) and 8: 285 (Biography of Asmā' bint 'Umays). A slightly more elaborate version of this account involving a final wise remark by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib also appears in the Shi'i account of Ibn Shahrāshūb in the context of elaborating on the wit of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, in Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, ed. Yūsuf al-Biqā'ī (Beirut: Dār al-aḍwā', 1991), 3: 311.

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it. Moreover, while it antedates most Shi'i accounts that portray him attempting to disassociate himself from his father, it serves as a reminder that the same device can be, and often is, used in different contexts to support strictly opposite claims. Such is the power of genealogy in early Islam, it cannot fail to be an issue between traditions.

We encounter another appeal by Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr to his paternal descent in some of the Sunni accounts of his death. There he is said to have pleaded vainly with his would-be-killer, Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj, to spare his life because he was the son of Abū Bakr. These accounts reflect negatively on him, since they show him unabashedly using his paternal kinship only in an attempt to escape death. [37]

Not all Sunni sources represent Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr in such an unfavorable light. In the *Ta'rīkh* of Ibn al-Athīr, two accounts of his death are given, both positive. In the longer one, when Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr is captured by Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj after being abandoned by his companions, he boldly defies his assailant. Threatened with burning alive, he accepts death as what is due to the friends of God (Ar. *awliyā' Allah*) at the hands of the unjust. Then he curses Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj, predicting a time when he and his patrons will burn in hell in "flames that Allah will set further ablaze whenever they die out" (Ar. *nāran talẓā kullamā khabat zādahā Allah sa'īran*). [38] In the second, briefer account, he fights bravely against the army of 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ until killed in battle.

C. Genealogy as a device of historiographical contestation

Genealogical references in accounts relating to Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr could have more than one motive in a given case. Describing his governorship of Egypt in the period preceding his death, Shi'i sources use genealogy to two ends at once: first, to contest Umayyad claims to power and legitimacy; second, to deny the legitimacy of the pre-'Alid caliphs Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān. This strategy is best illustrated by the purported correspondence between Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān.

37. The earliest such reference is in the work of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam. See, Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ miṣr wa al-maghrib*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar (Cairo: Maktabat al-thaqāfa al-diniyya, 1995), 149.
38. 'Alī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi al-ta'rīkh* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-azhariyya, 1301A.H./1883), 3: 181.

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According to the sources, Mu'āwiya attempted to intimidate the young governor into abandoning his post. [39] In the most basic version of the correspondence, he inveighs against Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr for his role in the murder of 'Uthmān, menaces him with military action, and threatens dire consequences if he does not relinquish his post. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr replies by rejecting Mu'āwiya's threats and cursing him for waging war against righteous men and killing many good Muslims. [40] This basic version of the story, which is common to some Sunni and Shi'i sources, seems to lay blame equally on both men for their actions in the first civil war. There is, however, a more elaborate Shi'i version of the correspondence, in which the letters are used in an overtly propagandistic manner. It occurs in one of the earliest Shi'i sources: Naṣr b. Muzāḥim al-Minqarī's account of events surrounding the Battle of Ṣiffīn. [41]

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39. Although there is no consensus about who was responsible for opening the correspondence, in most accounts Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān is given the initiative. Logically, this is perhaps most likely considering that the condition of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr in Egypt at the time was relatively precarious. Taking into account the content and nature of the letters exchanged, it is therefore hard to imagine that Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr would have undertaken to initiate a correspondence that would provoke further a man who had already sent a sizeable army against him. For that reason, it is perhaps unlikely that the correspondence, if historical at all, would have begun at the initiative of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr.

40. Al-Thaqafī, al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd include a letter by each of 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ (leader of the Umayyad army to Egypt) and Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān and the responses of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr to both letters. The letter of 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ is in substance very similar to that of Mu'āwiya. See al-Thaqafī, *al-Ghārāt*, 180-184; Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-Ṭabarī* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2001), 3: 130-131; 'Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Hibat Allah Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha,* ed. Ḥasan Tamīm (Beirut: Dār maktabat al-ḥayāh, 1963), 2: 317-318. Al-Ṣafadī includes both letters as well but does not mention the response of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr to either one of them in Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafasteṭī, *al-Wāfī bi al-wafayāt,* ed. Sven Dedering (Istanbul: Millī Eğitim Basımevi, 1949), 2: 258; Ibn Kathīr also mentions the two letters and refrains from including the responses of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr to them by describing these responses as containing crude words (Ar. *fihi ghilẓa/fihi kalāmun ghaliẓ*) in 'Imād al-Dīn Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya* (Egypt: Maṭba'at al-sa'āda, 1932), 7: 313-314.

41. Al-Minqarī, *Waq'at Ṣiffīn,* 118-121.

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Al-Minqarī's Shi'i version of the exchange differs significantly from the common one in both tone and content. Here it is Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr who initiates the correspondence. In a letter to Mu'āwiya he first praises the Prophet, then goes on to praise 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and list the qualities that supported his right to succeed, naming his early conversion, exceptional piety, kinship to the Prophet, and exemplary career. At the same time, he attacks Mu'āwiya and his father Abū Sufyān as utterly devoid of good qualities. In closing, he denounces both men for daring to oppose the Prophet in the past, and curses Mu'āwiya for contesting the right of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in the present. In his reply to Muḥammad, Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān takes a similar line. He begins by insulting and belittling his opponent, and insinuates that Muḥammad has himself provided the ammunition for combating his own arguments. He calls him "the one who has brought rebuke upon his own father" (Ar. *al-zāri 'alā abih*). Mu'āwiya recalls how Abū Bakr was the first to usurp the right of 'Alī, first by denying him the chance to succeed the Prophet as leader of the Muslim community, then by striving to isolate him socially and politically. He also relates how Abū Bakr encouraged and trained his companion 'Umar to do the same, setting a standard for those who came afterwards. Thus, while acknowledging 'Alī's right, Mu'āwiya points to a tradition of usurpation established through the work of Abū Bakr – and this in response to the charges of usurpation leveled by Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr against Mu'āwiya and his father. The tables have been turned.

Mu'āwiya's response reveals al-Minqarī's propagandistic strategy: 'Alī's legitimacy is not a matter of debate. Even Mu'āwiya, his staunchest opponent, was ready to recognize the superiority of 'Alī's claim. Rather, it is the identity of those who have consistently usurped 'Alī's right and de facto contested his rule that is brought to the fore. Through Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's impassioned attack and Mu'āwiya's cleverly crafted response, al-Minqarī denounces and discredits all those whom the Shi'is consider usurpers. That the defense of 'Alī's right should stem from the son of Abū Bakr, or at least be occasioned by him, is characteristic of this genre of argument. Parallel instances are provided by the Shi'i accounts referred to earlier in which Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr is made to denounce his father and dissociate himself from him. In the present case, however, the

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condemnation of 'Alī's enemies is on a far larger scale. It undermines the credibility of Mu'āwiya who, to the extent that he admits 'Alī's right, convicts himself of opportunism in opposing him. As we hear of Mu'āwiya's criticism of Muḥammad for his involvement in the murder of 'Uthmān, we are reminded that Mu'āwiya himself had been unwilling to help his cousin 'Uthmān when the latter was under siege, and that he was now taking advantage of the poor man's demise by claiming to wage a war to avenge him.

The correspondence between Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr and Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān is therefore to be read in the context of confessional contestation. Genealogical references trigger condemnations of both men: of Mu'āwiya for his role in opposing 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib during his caliphate, and of Abū Bakr for his actions at the time of the Prophet's death, which promoted a system of leadership that sidestepped the claims of the immediate family of the Prophet and created a situation in which 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was put on the same level as other claimants, to his supporters' great chagrin. Al-Minqarī's version of the correspondence condemns all 'Alī's foes equally. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr escapes condemnation because he supported 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. But more importantly, the reference to his father gives the cue for al-Minqarī's list of grievances against the opponents of 'Alī and is thus central to this piece of Shi'i propaganda.

Conclusion

In dealing with figures from the past, Muslim biographers and historians typically adduce two main legitimating factors: genealogical linkages and personal merits. As a rule, these two principles of legitimation were seen to work in tandem. However, when genealogy and personal behavior pulled in opposite directions, a problem arose. For how does one explain the actions of one who worked to oppose the family into which he was born? And how does one justify an individual whose political commitments run counter to his inherited loyalties?

This article has shown that Shi'i and Sunni traditions often use similar methods to deal with such genealogical "misfits." Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's commitment to the 'Alid cause and his controversial career during the period of the first Muslim civil war necessitated a

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subtle treatment in both traditions. Relying on notions of alternate, adoptive and genealogical influence, and of predestination, both traditions create profiles of this individual that satisfy their respective requirements. For Sunnis, maintaining Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr's innocence of the murder of 'Uthmān b. 'Affān is the main objective. This was important for Shi'is too, but not as important as justifying the role that Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr played in support of the 'Alid cause. In enabling these portrayals, the tool of genealogy became a double-edged sword, articulating sectarian ideology.

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